

## How to Do Historic Research in New York City

Researching the history of a building or group of buildings is an important first step in assessing significance. The sources listed in this guide include both original records (primary sources) and key secondary sources, like books. Every building and neighborhood is different, so depending upon what you're researching, you may use some but not others of these resources. In addition, keep in mind that this document does not include every single outlet for research, just the most commonly used ones.

Always bring a picture ID with you to any library, archives, or other research outlet. Many places have security scans for sharp and potentially dangerous objects, so keep that in mind when you pack your bag for the day.

### **1. Determining if a building is landmarked**

#### New York City Landmarks

One of the first questions to ask is, "Is the building landmarked?" If it is landmarked, then information about the building can usually more easily be found.

To find out a building is landmarked, you can search by its address on the Department of Buildings' Building Information System website. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dob/html/home/home.shtml>. On the page for the building, there will be an "L" next to the "Landmark Status" field if the building part of a historic district or is an individual landmark. If the building is not landmarked, the field will be blank.

Please note that this is not an exact system, and the Department of Buildings has frequently not marked correctly landmarked buildings. To double check, the best, most complete sources is the book: *A Guide to New York City Landmarks* published by the Landmarks Preservation Foundation in 2004.

Every individual landmark or historic district has a designation report that describes the history of the building/neighborhood. Most historic district designation reports list and describe the history of every single building within them. There are two different locations of designation reports:

Reports for buildings that have recently been designated are posted online on the Landmarks Preservation Commission's website: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/html/forms/reports.shtml>

Other reports are posted online through the Neighborhood Preservation Center. They are still building the database, and eventually, the designation reports for every individual landmark and historic district within New York City can be found online at:

[http://www.neighborhoodpreservationcenter.org/designation\\_reports/index.php](http://www.neighborhoodpreservationcenter.org/designation_reports/index.php)

If you are not able to find the report online, the Neighborhood Preservation Center has paper copies of all of the reports. Call to inquire about the report you're looking for (212) 228.2781.

#### State and National Register of Historic Places Nomination Reports

In addition, in New York State, you can look up the National Register report for a building if it is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Go to:

<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/resources/index.htm>

1. Click on "Document Imaging for National Register"
2. Agree to their terms
3. Click on the "Basic Criteria" tab at the top
4. Type in the building's name under "property name" and click on "Results" to search
5. If you can't find it under property name, you can peruse all the listings by county name.

## 2. Books/Guides to Check for Building Information

*The AIA Guide to New York City.* By Norval White and Elliot Willensky, published in 2000. The book lists and describes many of the outstanding buildings in New York City, and it's always a good first place to check for information on a building's history. The *AIA Guide* is on reserve at the FIT Library.

Other books to check for specific building and building theme information are:

- ~ *A Guide to New York City Landmarks* published by the Landmarks Preservation Foundation (on reserve at the FIT Library)
- ~ *The Landmarks of New York.* By Barbaralee Diamondstein.
- ~ *New York Streetscapes: Tales of Manhattan's Significant Buildings and Landmarks* by Christopher Gray
- ~ *Architectural Guidebook to New York City* by Francis Morrone.
- ~ *Bricks and Brownstone: The History of the New York Rowhouse.* By Charles Lockwood.
- ~ *Manhattan Moves Uptown.* By Charles Lockwood.
- ~ *The City Observed New York: A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan.* By Paul Goldberger
- ~ *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* By Robert A.M. Stern
- ~ *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism 1890-1915* By Robert A.M. Stern
- ~ *New York 1930: Architecture Between the Two World Wars* By Robert A.M. Stern
- ~ *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* By Robert A.M. Stern
- ~ *New York 2000: Architecture and Urbanism between the Bicentennial and the Millennium* By Robert A.M. Stern.
- ~ *The Encyclopedia of New York City.* Edited by Kenneth T. Jackson

There are many other NYC books related to architecture, specific building types, specific neighborhoods, etc. Browsing the New York City section of your library or a bookstore is a good way to get a sense of what might already be written about the building you're researching. Many neighborhoods also have books written on their history and architecture, so be sure to look through these types of books.

## 3. Building Files Research to Determine Date of Construction, Architect, and Alterations

If the building date and architect information was not found through either designation reports or through one of the many books on New York City architecture, the next step in researching the building is looking at the building's file at the Department of Buildings/Municipal Archives. Since each borough has a separate Department of Buildings office, researching buildings in each borough is different than in the others. Detailed information on researching Manhattan buildings is found below.

The Manhattan Department of Buildings was created in 1865, and from that year forward, DOB has kept a record of all new buildings, alterations to existing buildings, demolitions, and other changes to sites. DOB's website, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dob/html/home/home.shtml>, is a good resource for starting your search. Its Building Information System (or BIS) is a compilation of all of the information DOB holds. A semi-reliable list of all the permits that DOB issued from 1865 until about 1989 can be found on DOB's website:

- Enter the building address or block and lot at <http://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/bispi00.jsp> to bring up the property profile.
- Scroll to the bottom and click on "Actions."
- This brings up a list of all of the permits that have been filed for the building from about 1865

until 1988.

- The most important permits are the:
  - o New Building Permits, or “NB”, which is what is filed when a new building is being constructed
  - o Alteration Permits, or “Alt”, which is what is filed when an existing building is modified
  - o Demolition Permits, or “DM” or “DP”, which is what is filed when an existing building is demolished
  - o All others are of lesser importance, but could be useful depending upon what you’re researching
- Each permit is numbered by the type of permit it is, the number of the permit, and the year it was filed. For instance, NB 101-03 is the 101<sup>st</sup> new building permit filed for in 1903. Likewise, Alt. 44-94, is the 44<sup>th</sup> alteration permit filed for in 1894.
  - o The century that the permit was filed in can be confusing. Since the Dept. of Buildings was created in 1865, any year in the decades of the 00s, 10s, 20s, 30s, 40s, or 50s you can assume is from the 1900s. Likewise, the Department of Buildings stopped using this system about 1990, so any permit with a 90’s year is probably from 1890s. The decades for the 60s, 70s, and 80s, can be permits from the 1800s or the 1900s, so you may have to either make a guess by looking at the building or by doing further research.
- Once you have the permit numbers, there are a couple of ways to look up more details on the permits.
- Note that alterations and new building permits issued after 1990 are filed under “Jobs/Filings” and all the information about the application is electronically available here.

### Block and Lot Notation

NOTE that the Department of Buildings historically has kept track of properties and permits by block and lot number rather than by address. The easiest way to find out a building’s block and lot number is to put the address into DOB’s Building Information System and the block and lot number will appear on the page. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dob/html/home/home.shtml>

Each property in New York City is divided into block and lots. A block is typically the contiguous piece of land surrounded by streets (e.g. the north side of 9<sup>th</sup> Street, the south side of 10<sup>th</sup> Street, the east side of Second Avenue, and the west side of First Avenue would all be one block). Each block is divided into several different lots, denoting ownership.

It is usually the case that there is only one building on a block and lot. However, it is not uncommon that there will be more than one building on a lot. This happens if there’s a front building and a back building or if an owner owns several buildings in a row on a block.

Lot numbers are usually from about 1 – 80 or so, but every once in a while you’ll see a lot number that looks like 1001-1006 or 7501. That indicates that the building is a condominium building. Because lot numbers denote ownership, a number like 1001-1006 would tell you that there are 6 condo units (1001, 1002, 1003, 1004, 1005, and 1006) within the building, and therefore 6 different owners of the property. DOB’s website cannot handle numbers that large, so instead of giving 1001-1006 for a lot number, it will provide a number like 7501 or 7502. The 1001-1006 number is the official block and lot number, and DOB’s 7501 number is just an indicator that the building is a condo. For condos, the easiest way to get the correct block and lot number is to look at the most recent Sanborn map (see Maps section below).

### Building Files at the Municipal Archives (31 Chambers Street)

For buildings in Manhattan with block numbers between 1 and 968 (from the tip of Manhattan up to about 39<sup>th</sup> Street), the actual permits that were filed can be seen and copied at the Municipal Archives. To request a building’s file, you’ll need to call or email your request ahead of time and give the Archives the

building's block and lot number. The block and lot number can be found on DOB's website by entering the building's address: <http://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/bispi00.jsp>

The Municipal Archives typically pulls its files once a week on Thursdays, so you'll need to request the files by Wednesday night, and the files will be ready for your viewing that Friday. You can make photocopies of the files for 25 cents a piece. The Archives works on an honor system, so once you have made your photocopies for the day, go to the front desk and tell them how many you've made so they can charge you.

Be aware that over the years, many permits and entire lot files have disappeared. Be sure to compare the list of permits you found on the DOB-BIS website with what you found in the paper files to see if there is anything missing.

#### Docket Books at the Municipal Archives (31 Chambers Street)

If you were not able to find all the permits you needed in the Municipal Archives' block and lot files, the next step is to try to find the information in the Docket Books, also kept at the Municipal Archives.

Logs of every New Building and Alteration permit from 1865 until about the 1960s are kept on microfilm at the Municipal Archives. The logs are called the Docket Books, and if you have an NB or an Alt. number you can obtain the major information for the application, like the architect, owner, use, building dimensions, etc. The Docket Book microfilms are kept in a cabinet on the north wall of the Municipal Archives.

If you have found the NB or Alt number through the DOB-BIS website, it is easy to find the information for the permit. For instance, if you have N.B. 144-11, go to the microfilm for the New Building docket for 1911, and scroll down until you find the 144<sup>th</sup> permit. Note that the permits numbers listed on BIS are sometimes filed under wrong addresses, so double check that the information makes sense. Also check that the NB permit does not refer to an outhouse or other building that is not the primary building you are researching. Lastly check one of the last columns of the dockets labeled "completed", which will sometimes have the notation "abandoned," and if that is the case, then the new building or the alteration was never carried out.

If you have not been able to find a NB or Alt number through the DOB-BIS website, you can also try perusing the indexes for your building. The indexes for each year are arranged alphabetically by the first letter of a street, but are not alphabetized within each letter. Because of the sheer number of permits, it helps, when using these indexes, to have some idea of when the building was erected so that you do not have to look through too many volumes. Docket book information was also published in the *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* (see below).

#### Office for Metropolitan History Online Database

If you have a New Building permit number that dates from 1900-1986, you can look up the basic information on the building online using a database created by the Office for Metropolitan History. Put in the N.B. number and the year of the permit into the form, and the architect, owner, and a short description of the building will come up. You can also search by building address, street, architect, owner, etc., so if you do not have a N.B. number and your building is on Thompson Street, you can do a search under "Thompson" and see if your building's N.B. comes up.

Note that this database lists all NB permits from 1900-1986 and the permits that were "abandoned" are not marked as such, so you may need to double check the information. Nonetheless, this database is a great way to easily find out the building date, architect, owner, etc. of a building without having to leave your home. <http://www.metrohistory.com/searchfront.htm>

### Building Files at the Department of Buildings (280 Broadway)

The Manhattan Department of Buildings houses information on all new buildings and alterations from 1865 until the present day. If you have not been able to find out the basic information on your building online or through the resources of the Municipal Archives, you can try the Department of Building's resources. In addition, the Department of Buildings also has the drawings of all new buildings and alterations, so if you wanted to see the plans and elevations of a building, you have to go to the Department of Buildings.

Before going to the Department of Buildings, look up the NB or Alt number that you are looking for through the DOB-BIS website. <http://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/bispi00.jsp>. Enter the building address and once the property profile appears on screen, scroll down and click on "Actions" which will bring you to a list of permits. If you are looking for more recent permits from about 1990 until the present day, click on "Jobs/Filings."

Bring a print out of the list of actions for a building to the Department of Buildings (you can also use the computer consoles at DOB, but it is recommended that you come prepared with the information, as there can be a wait to use the computers). Take the NB or the Alt number to the window #15 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of DOB and fill out the appropriate form to request the microfiche (should be in a box at window #15). Submit the filled out form at window #15 along with a valid ID. The DOB personnel will give you a ticket, and you will have to wait until your number is called, indicating that they have found the microfiche for you. The microfiche should contain both a copy of the NB or the Alt form and the drawings for the new building or alteration.

To make copies of the microfiche, you'll need to take the microfiche to an outside copy center. Inquire at DOB where this copy center is.

If you want to see all of the actions in the history of a building – that is new buildings, alterations, etc. – you will need to email or fax in a request form (or drop it off in person) a three business days in advance. The fax is (212) 566-5601 (Manhattan only), and you may want to call and confirm receipt before heading off; the telephone number is (212) 566-0272. You can also hand deliver your request to 280 Broadway, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. The material will be held for you for two days. You can pick up the entire file of microfiche for the lot at window #15 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. You must look at the entire file the day you pick it up – files will not be held over for you. The file will include every action and may take a while to sort through. You are limited to ordering five block and lot files per day.

In addition to the information available at 280 Broadway, a collection of "I-cards" (I for Inspection) is available at the agency's office 215 West 125<sup>th</sup> Street. These are individual note cards filled out in the early decades of the twentieth century when inspectors came to check if a building met code. Most I cards are for residential buildings.

### Tax Records at the Municipal Archives (31 Chambers Street)

Tax records are useful for dating buildings that predate the Buildings Department. To use the tax records you will need to find the ward number for the area (a ward was a political subdivision). There is a ward map at the Municipal Archives, but you can also look up the ward map in the *Encyclopedia of New York* under the entry for "wards." Note that the ward numbers changed a few times in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when large wards were split. The ward map will indicate when each ward was created and what ward they were part of before the split.

The tax records are on microfilm at the Municipal Archives in cabinets on the north wall, near the windows. Tax records for all boroughs are available here, but some will need to be ordered because they

are stored off site. Most Manhattan records are available. Remember that before 1874 for the West Bronx and 1895 for the East Bronx, records may be in White Plains, since the Bronx was part of Westchester County.

It is best if you have an idea of when a building was built before you start. For instance, if you can identify that the building has Greek Revival elements, then it was most likely built between 1830 and 1855. It is recommended that you start with the later period and work your way backwards through the microfilm. This is easiest for many reasons, including that the handwriting is easier to read, the documents are in better shape, and in many cases, street names and addresses changed in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After you find the ward and year you are looking for, scroll through the microfilm to find the street. The streets are arranged alphabetically, and then by block. For instance, it will say “Bleecker Street between Thompson and Sullivan” and then list the buildings on that block. Take note of several things once you find the building you are looking for – the owner’s name, the existence and size of any building on the lot, and the assessed value of the property. In earlier records, there is the notation “H & L”, or sometimes simply just “L”. “H & L” means that there is a house on the lot. “L” simply means that there is just a lot (and no building on it). Be aware that the “H & L” or “L” are often noted with a variation on ditto marks referencing “H & L” or “L” notations above. Later records will give you the number of stories in the building, which is useful. Three different things can indicate a new building or addition to an existing building:

- One is that the notation changes from an “L” to and “H & L” from one year to the next, indicating that the property was a vacant lot, but then a building was built on it. However, because sometimes a building is not the first one to be built on the lot, you can also look for other things.
- Another thing to look out for is a change in assessment value. If there is a significant jump in value from one year to the next, then you can many times assume the jump indicates a new building being built on the lot. How one defines a significant jump can be difficult. A good rule of thumb is any jump greater than \$2000, particularly if there was no building previously on a lot. Sometimes even a \$1000 jump can indicate a new building.
- Once the number of stories starts appearing on the documents, compare the number of stories indicated in the tax records with what is existing today and look for a change if one does occur.
- Pay attention to the property owners, too. Sometimes when a new owner comes in, a new house or building will be built (this is obviously not always the case)

#### Architects in Practice in New York City

Available at the New York Public Library, this book is useful for double checking the spelling and names of architects that you may find through the Department of Building/Municipal Archive files. The book is split into two volumes that list every architect active in New York City and when they worked and where their offices were located. 1840-1900 is by Dennis Steadman Francis (available in the reference stacks of FIT’s library); 1900-1940 is by James Ward (available at the main branch of the New York Public Library, but not available at the FIT library).

### **3. Map and Altas Research to Determine a Neighborhood’s or Building’s Development**

Current and historic maps can be an effective way to date a building and understand a neighborhood’s development.

#### Sanborn Maps/Land Atlas

The current version of the Land Atlas, also known as the Sanborn map, can be viewed at the New York Public Library’s Map Division at their main library on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue. The Sanborn map provides a great basis for building information and is particularly useful if you are surveying blocks of



buildings. It provides current information on the block and lot numbers, building height, building dimensions, lot dimensions, etc.

#### Historic Maps and Atlases

Old atlases, published by Perris, Bromley, Robinson, Beers, Sanborn, and others, are invaluable for tracing information on neighborhood development and on the history of a particular site. These atlases were published every few years and show what was standing at a particular time, materials used in construction, where old farm lines were, names of buildings, etc. Be sure to refer to the key in the front of each volume; this will aid in understanding what all of the map symbols and colors mean. It is often a good idea to record the key information either in note form or photographically, as it is easy to forget what all those odd symbols and colors mean. Be sure to check if the atlas was updated at some point after its initial publication (this is noted on a sticker that is usually placed on one of the first pages). If an 1895 atlas was updated through 1916, what you are looking at is a 1916 map, not an 1895 map.

Atlases for various years are available at the New York Public Library (Map Division on the first floor; this is the most extensive atlas collection in New York) and the New-York Historical Society. The New York Public Library's Map Division has the best collection of NYC historic maps and is worth a visit <http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/map/mapping.html>. Some of the maps can be viewed through NYPL's digital library, but visiting the Map Division is recommended.

#### **4. Determining Ownership of a Building, Past and Present**

Tracing building ownership is good way to understand how a building developed and was changed over the years.

##### Current and Recent Owners

Owner information is part of the public record, and current information on ownership can be found online.

- To just get the name and address of the owner of a property, you can go to the NYC Department of Finance website <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dof/html/home/home.shtml> and click on "Property History/Value" under the Property section of the agency's home page. Put in the Block and Lot number and the owner's name will appear. To find the owner's mailing address, which is often different than the building's address, click on a "Statement of Account" form.

- Often times, the owner information including the owner's phone number is also listed on recent permits through the Dept. of Building's Building Information System. Go to <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dob/html/home/home.shtml> and search for your building. On the Property Profile, click on "Jobs/Filings" and look at the most recent permit to see if a building owner and phone number are listed.

- Recent deeds, which are the official document signing over a property from one owner to another, can be viewed online at <http://a836-acris.nyc.gov/Scripts/Coverpage.dll/index> through a system known as ACRIS (or Automated City Registry Information System). Click on "Search Property Records" and the on "Parcel Identifier." ACRIS has documents from about c. 1970 until the present day. The documents include deeds, mortgage information, information on selling air rights, any easements, and much more. Search using the Block and Lot number, and click on any document that says "Deed" to view it. "Party 1" is the seller and "Party 2" is the buyer (and current owner if this is the most recent deed on file).

##### Historic Ownership

- To trace the ownership of a building, the easiest way is to look at the deed conveyance records at the

Real Property Records Office, 66 John Street, 13<sup>th</sup> floor (for Manhattan). The records run from the 17<sup>th</sup> c. until about 1960, and can sometimes help pinpoint a building's construction date. For instance, sometimes the deeds describe the property, which can help figure out when a building appeared on it. You can also determine when parcels of land were subdivided for individual development.

You will need the block and lot number to use these records. It also helps to see if you can find a Liber number and Page number from a more recent deed from ACRIS. For instance, sometimes a deed will say, "This being the same premises described in the deed recorded in Liber 1234, Page 25. Liber is the Latin word for "book" and is how deeds are organized.

If you have a Liber/Page number, you can go straight to the microfilm or book for the specific Liber. The microfilm is located in the back lefthand corner of the room upon entering. They are organized numerically, but note that many times there is more than one roll of microfilm per Liber, so be sure to pull the correct one as per the page number you need. Using the microfilm reader, scroll through the pages to find the one you need, and either copy it or write down the information that you need. The microfilm should reference earlier deed Liber and Page numbers from when the building was last sold, so you can take that Liber and Page number to look up the earlier deed in the microfilm and work your way backwards.

If you don't have the Liber and Page number for a deed for a specific property, you can look them up in docket books. The docket books are located by turning left immediately upon entering the space, and they are shelved along the entrance wall numerically by block. The books are organized numerically by lot number, then under each lot there are pages devoted to "Conveyances" and "Deeds," as well as "Mortgages." (Note: Conveyances and Deeds are the same thing. The term conveyance was used in earlier notations, and the term deed in later decades). It is important to note, though, that when looking at the Conveyance pages, the Grantee (or buyer) is listed before the Grantor (or seller) in the chart. However, on the Deed pages, it reverses.

Many of the older books from the 17<sup>th</sup> c. through 1898 (located in the back on the right) also have a very useful brief history of each block (look for it at the beginning of the entry for that block). The smaller, horizontal-format, gray books have transactions from 1900-c.1960. These are listed by block and lot, with separate pages for each lot.

Property records for other boroughs are kept in their Municipal Buildings, but are arranged in a similar manner.

- If you are just looking for who the owner was in a specific year, you can also just look at the Tax Records at the Municipal Archives (see the "Tax Records" section above).

## **5. Finding Information about a Building or a Neighborhood Through Historic Newspaper Articles, Magazines, and Other Publications**

Newspapers, Magazines, and other publications can be a great way to get information on a building's historical, cultural, and architectural history.

### *New York Times*

The *New York Times* is the first place to start for newspaper articles. The *Times* has extensively covered architecture and development since the nineteenth century, especially in its Sunday real estate section, and even more recent articles often feature the history of buildings and architecture.

Most historic articles can be found online through [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). Some articles are available for



free, and others you have to pay for. If you subscribe to either *Times Select* or if you get home delivery of the *Times*, you can download up to 100 of the pay-articles a month for free.

In addition, entire run of the *Times* is now on-line and available through FIT's library, <http://www3.fitnyc.edu/library/>. Go to the database section [http://www3.fitnyc.edu/library/digital\\_library/DigLib/DigLib\\_Descriptions.htm](http://www3.fitnyc.edu/library/digital_library/DigLib/DigLib_Descriptions.htm) and then find Proquest Historical Newspapers. You can request key words and also specific dates. I recommend doing an Advanced Search and being as specific as possible. With Proquest, you can obtain pdfs of the articles as they originally appeared in the *Times*.

The New York Public Library also has ProQuest available at their workstations in their following locations: Humanities and Social Sciences Library (main branch); Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Science, Industry and Business Library; and The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

#### Brooklyn Daily Eagle

In addition, issues of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, the major newspaper for Brooklyn, which also included news of other parts of New York City, are on line through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle/>

#### Other Newspapers

There were other important New York City newspapers, but with the exception of the *New York Tribune* in the 1890s and early 20th century, these are not indexed. For more in depth research, you can look at *New York Tribune*, *New York Herald*, *New York Sun*, *Evening Post*, and *World*. All of these, and other papers, are on microfilm at the New York Public Library. If you know that something happened on a particular date, you might wish to check these other newspapers.

In addition, the New-York Historical Society has compiled a chronological card file of local newspapers in their extensive collection; they also have a hand-written book index to the *Evening Post* and a card-file index to the *Sun*.

#### Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals

The Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals indexes more than 2,000 periodicals published worldwide on archaeology, city planning, interior design, and historic preservation, as well as architecture. It can be a great source for articles on a building or neighborhood you may be researching. Because it is an index, not a full-text database, you can only get a listing of related articles and it will not give you the full text of an article. You will have to take the information that you get from your index search and look it up in the appropriate periodical.

The Avery Index is housed and maintained at Columbia University's Avery Library, which specializes in art and architecture resources. However, unless you have an affiliation with Columbia, you cannot use their library. FIT's Library has the index on CD-ROM at selected "Digital Library" workstations, Reference Room, 4th floor. Unfortunately, the index is not available online yet through the FIT Library website. Once you are at one of the appropriate workstations, return to the Desktop and click on the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals icon.

If you find through the index an article you want to look at, get the citation (e.g. *Architecture Magazine*, May 1989, p. 23-45) and go to the Periodicals department of the library to find the article. The library does have the basic architectural periodicals that you will need. For a listing of what periodicals are available at FIT, please go to

[http://www3.fitnyc.edu/library/periodicals/periodicals\\_subject.htm#architecture](http://www3.fitnyc.edu/library/periodicals/periodicals_subject.htm#architecture).

The Avery Index can also be accessed at the main branch of the New York Public Library, Fifth Avenue and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, on their computer terminals. NYPL also has many of the periodicals listed in the Index at their main branch.

#### Real Estate Record and Builders Guide

The *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* was a magazine published weekly starting 1868-1974 and is a great resource for finding new building information. If you have a new building permit number from the Department of Buildings Building Information System (BIS), you can use these books to find the information rather than using the Municipal Archives of DOB records, as each week there was a listing of proposed buildings in Manhattan and Brooklyn and later the Bronx after 1874. There is an index for building listings in the 1880s. There are also articles on buildings and neighborhood development, but these are not indexed

The New York Public Library has most volumes available at their main branch, although many are stored off site and need to be requested. Columbia's Avery Library has many of the original volumes on the shelf and the entire run on microfilm. Avery also has the *Index to Pictures: Real Estate Record and Guide, Volumes 35-1001, 1885-1918*.

#### Stokes Iconography of Manhattan Island.

The *Iconography of Manhattan Island* by I.N. Phelps Stokes, a wealthy collector and architect, is a comprehensive six-volume history of New York City from 1498-1909. The volumes are arranged chronologically and list the happenings in the city from its earliest period. It also has a detailed early history of the city and hundreds of early views of New York. The source is thoroughly indexed in its last volume. The resource is available at the New York Public Library.

#### Diaries.

There are two 19th-century diaries that are filled with information about New York. They are the diaries of Philip Hone and George Templeton Strong. Both are available at the main branch of the New York Public Library

## **6. Finding Historic Photos of a Building or Street**

Although many historic photographs of buildings can now be found online, some libraries, archives, and museums require that you visit them in person to look at historic photos.

#### New York Public Library

The New York Public Library has a great digital collection of historic photos and maps. Go to <http://www.nypl.org/digital/> for your search. It is best to search by either the building name or the name of the street. Low-resolution copies of these images can be obtained through the website. High-resolution digital or print copies of the images must be ordered.

#### Library of Congress

The Library of Congress also has an extensive collection of historic photos and images online. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html> . Again, it is best to search by either building name or the name of the street.

#### Tax Photographs

From 1939-1941, New York City photographed every building all five boroughs of the city. So if your building was built prior to 1941, there is a Tax Photo of it. Tax photos can be viewed on microfilm at the Municipal Archives (31 Chambers Street), or a print can be ordered directly from the Municipal Archives

by filling out an online form. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/records/html/taxphotos/home.shtml#order>

To view the building's photo on microfilm, you will need the block and lot number. The block and lot number is most easily found through the Dept. of Building's website:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dob/html/home/home.shtml> Type in the address in the sidebar, and the property profile will come up which will include the block and lot number.

Once at the Municipal Archives, a black index book on the table near the center of the room will include reference numbers to the microfilm if you know the block and lot number (the book contains numbers only for Manhattan; the index information for other boroughs is on microfilm). With the reference number (it will look something like "D-1365"), go to the microfilm drawer on the north wall of the main room and search for the roll. The section of the film containing your index number will include numerous tax photos all individually identified by block and lot. You can make a copy from the microfilm but generally, the print outs from microfilm are not very clear. Photographic prints can be ordered by filling out a Tax Photo Order Form at the Municipal Archives.

#### Additional Municipal Archives Photos

The Municipal Archives has additional photos besides the Tax Photographs. Some of these photos are available for perusal online at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/records/html/gallery/home.shtml> .

Included in the Municipal Archives collection is the Manhattan Borough President's photograph collection, which covers the period from the 1920s to the 1940s. A card catalogue on the east wall of the main room is indexed alphabetically and numerically by street name and street number. A brief description of the image is included on each card along with a number. With the number, you can pull the corresponding microfilm from the drawers across the room on the west wall behind the help desk. Like the tax photos, these too can be ordered by filling out an order form.

#### New-York Historical Society

The New-York Historical Society has a collection of photographs, but you must make an appointment with their prints and photographs division to take a look at them. Information on the N-YHS's prints and photographs can be found at

[https://www.nyhistory.org/web/default.php?section=library&page=graphic\\_collections](https://www.nyhistory.org/web/default.php?section=library&page=graphic_collections)

#### Museum of the City of New York

Some of the Museum of the City of New York's photograph collection is available online. However, the majority of the photos and other items within the museum's collection need to be researched by calling or emailing a request to the Museum's Department of Collection's Access. Sometimes the research staff will research the matter for you, and other times you will have to visit the museum in person. A \$25 fee is charged for some research requests. More information can be found on their website at:

<http://www.mcny.org/collections/67.html>

#### The LaGuardia and Wagner Archive at LaGuardia College

The LaGuardia and Wagner Archive, housed at LaGuardia College, has the papers of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and has an online collection of images of NYC public housing projects and the buildings demolished to build the projects, as well as streets that the city once considered for demolition and redevelopment but may be still intact.

Go to <http://www.laguardiawagnerarchive.lagcc.cuny.edu/defaultc.htm> and click on the "Photographs" tab. You can search by street name or by neighborhood.

## 7. Researching who lived in a building or businesses that may have been there

Finding out who lived and worked in a building is a great way to begin to develop its cultural history of a building.

### Historic Census Data

The census records will tell you who lived in a building and help you understand its social context. The records typically include the head of household, dependents, servants, boarders, etc. Census listings for different years asked for different bits of information; you can often find out sex, race, national origin, age, occupation, etc. of residents. The occupation, race, and national origin will help you get a sense of the class of tenants.

The U.S. Census is taken every ten years, but they are closed to public scrutiny for about 72 years. Thus, the census records are now available through 1930 (unfortunately the entire 1890 census for New York City was lost in a fire).

New York State undertook its own census in 1905, 1915, and 1925 (all available) for New York County; i.e. Manhattan, (the Bronx was part of New York County in 1905) and in other years for other counties. There is also a New York City Police Census taken in 1890 (this is available only at the Municipal Archives), but this just lists names, offering considerably less information than other census listings.

Using these records can be a bit confusing and generally takes several steps (to add to the complication, the records of each census are arranged a bit differently). The more basic data you have, the easier they are to use. From 1880 on, you should have the address of the property. Prior to 1880 you must have a name of a tenant since the census records are not organized by address. For the various census before 1880 there are indices by name. For later years you can use a bizarre system called "Soundex" which will help you locate a name if you do not have an address.

The best place to use the census is the **New York Public Library**. Microfilms are in Room 119. For instructions go to the Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy Room in Room 121 and ask a librarian for assistance (they are usually very helpful). The Federal Census is also available at the **National Archives, New York City Office** at 201 Varick Street (212-337-1300); enter on Houston Street (second entrance). This is a pleasant place to work, but they do not have the State census. There are usually volunteer genealogists available to help you. The hours for the National Archives are Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and first and third Saturday of each month 8:00am-4:30pm; Tuesday and Thursday 8:00am-8:00pm. Internet: <http://www.archives.gov/>; NYC location: [http://www.archives.gov/facilities/ny/new\\_york\\_city.html](http://www.archives.gov/facilities/ny/new_york_city.html)

In addition to using the microfilms, many Federal census records are available on **AncestryPlus** from **Ancestry.com**, a subscription site that you can use at all branches of the New York Public Library. This database includes the images to all federal census records as well as indexes for 1790-1850 and 1920-1930. Other indexes will be completed soon. Note that New York State census records are not on line and that the indexes are only useful if you are looking for a name, not for an address.

### Directories for People and Businesses

Another way to supplement the census data research is to look up the information in historic directories. Historic directories are also useful if you are researching a non-residential building or a residential building that had a business on its ground floor. The directories are a precursor to phone directories before phones became commonly used and were published every year from the 18th century until well into the 20th century.

There are separate volumes for New York City (Manhattan and later the Bronx) and for Brooklyn and

scattered volumes for the towns and villages of Queens and Staten Island. They list residents, their address, occupation, and place of work. They are invaluable for identifying who lived in a residential building and for getting some idea of the type of person who lived in a particular area. There are reverse directories, which list people by address, for various years of the 19th century. Also useful are business directories, telephone directories, reverse telephone directories (by address), and the Social Register.

All of the directories are on microfilm at the New York Public Library and at the Municipal Archives. The only place that you can actually use hard copies of the New York City directories is at the New-York Historical Society (they are on a shelf on the left side of the library).

## **8. List of Above-Mentioned Libraries/Resources**

Real Property Records. 66 John Street, 13<sup>th</sup> floor. Hours: Monday-Friday, 9:00am-4:00pm.

New York City Department of Buildings (DOB)--Manhattan Office. 280 Broadway (the At. T. Stewart Store/aka Sun Building) between Reade and Chambers Streets. Records are on Third Floor. Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 – 4:30.

Internet: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dob/home.html>

Municipal Archives. Surrogate's Court/Hall of Records, 31 Chambers Street. Note the spectacular Beaux-Arts lobby (also great court rooms on 5th floor; spaces here often used in movies). Hours: Monday-Thursday, 9:00am-4:30pm and Friday 9:00am-1:00pm, (212-788-8578).

Internet: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doris/home.html>

Other Borough DOB Offices: Each borough has a Department of Buildings. Brooklyn: Brooklyn Municipal Building is on Court and Joralemon streets -- 8th floor. Bronx: East Tremont Avenue and Arthur Avenue. Queens: Queens Boulevard; Staten Island: Borough Hall. Each of these offices keeps different hours so call first.

New York Public Library. Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. Hours: Mon, Thurs, Fri, Sat 11am-6 pm; Tues, Wed 11am-7:30pm; Sun 1-5pm; (212-930-0830).

Internet: [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org)

The libraries catalogue (CATNYP) is on-line at the NYPL site.

The New York Public Library and the New-York Historical Society (see below) are the two great resources for New York City. Each has a library with a great deal of valuable information on many aspects of the city. The main catalogue and reading rooms of the library are located on the third floor (Carrère & Hastings's original spaces have been spectacularly restored by Davis Brody Bond). There are also specialized collections that you may need to use:

*United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division*. Room 121. (Same Hours as above, but closed Sundays.) The extensive collection of books on New York City is housed in here. Although more and more of the older collections have been placed on line, you must also check the book catalogue in this division. There is a photograph collection that may not be available through NYPL's digital collection called the Acker Collection, which is on microfiche. There is a card index by address at the reference desk (ask). All genealogical resources (census,

city directories, etc.) are on microfilm in Room 119.

*Art and Architecture Division* Room 313 (Same hours as above except closed Sundays). Extensive collection of books on art and to a somewhat lesser extent on architecture. This division also has clippings files on specific artists and architects (now on microfiche) that can provide unusual material.

*Map Division* Room 117 (Hours: Tues, Wed 1pm-7:30pm; Thurs, Fri, Sat 1pm-6pm; Sun and Mon closed) See discussion of maps and atlases above.

New-York Historical Society. Central Park West and West 76th Street. Hours: 10:00am-5:00pm, Tuesday-Saturday (212-873-3400).  
Internet: [www.nyhistory.org](http://www.nyhistory.org)

The library's catalogue is available on line at the NYHS site or New York University's online library system, Bobcat, at <http://www.bobcat.nyu.edu/> - click to connect and then click to search under New-York Historical Society.

The Historical Society has an extraordinary library of materials relating to New York City, and it is a relaxing place to work. You do not need an appointment to use the library. The only downside to research work here is that photocopying is limited. The library contains bound copies of NYC Directories covering much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and this is one of the easier places to do directory research. The Society also has collections of architectural drawings and a large collection of photographs, but you can only look at these by making an appointment in advance (extension 273).

Museum of the City of New York. Fifth Avenue and 103rd Street. Museum Hours: Monday-Friday, 10:00am-5:00pm (212-534-1672).  
Internet: [www.mcny.org](http://www.mcny.org)

The main resource here is the superb photo collection. The problem is its general inaccessibility. You must make an appointment to use this collection and since they do not have facilities for large numbers of researchers, you may have to wait some time to get in. Note that they charge \$25.00 for research appointments.

## **9. Additional Libraries/Archives that May Be Useful**

Municipal Reference Library. Surrogate's Court/Hall of Records--1st floor. Hours: Monday-Friday, 9:00am-4:30pm.  
Internet: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doris/html/dorisref.html>

This library is located at the rear of the 1st floor of the Surrogate's Court, on direct axis with the building's entrance. The collection here is quite mixed, but this is a convenient place in which to do research when downtown. The library has the most complete collection of annual reports of various city agencies, going back to the 19th century. These reports are often very valuable sources for information on civic projects. They also have clipping (vertical) files, an extensive collection of historic books about New York, and microfilm of the *New York Times* beginning in about 1914 (microfilm copies are 20 cents -- two dimes -- and they do not give change). The library also has a complete collection of NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission designation reports.



### Research Branches of the New York Public Library

As the library's collections have expanded, certain divisions have moved into separate buildings.

*Science and Business Library.* 188 Madison Avenue between 34th and 35th streets. (Mon, Fri, Sat 11am-6pm; Tues, Wed, Thurs 10am-8pm; Sun closed). If you are researching a topic related to business or science you may wish to visit this new, high-technology library in the old B. Altman Department Store. The conversion was designed by Gwathmey/Siegal. This library also has material about real estate and development, patent records, and microfilm of the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, an important business newspaper.

*Performing Arts Library.* Lincoln Center, located between the Metropolitan Opera House and the Vivian Beaumont Theater (Mon, Thurs 12pm-8pm; Tues, Wed, Fri 11am-6pm; Sat 10am-6pm). If you are researching a topic related to theater, music, or dance, you may wish to visit this library, an elegant design by Gordon Bunshaft, recently renovated by James Stewart Polshek Architects.

*Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,* 515 Lenox Avenue (Malcolm X Boulevard) and 135th Street (Mon, Tues, Wed 12pm-8pm; Thurs 11am-6pm; Sat 10am-5pm; Sun closed). Special collections, including photographs and manuscripts, have varying hours, so check [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org) for times. This is the major resource for research in topics related to African-American history.

New York Transit Museum Archive. 130 Livingston Street, Room C42, Brooklyn.

Monday – Friday, 9:00-5:00 (718) 694-1068.

Internet: [www.mta.info/mta/museum/index.html](http://www.mta.info/mta/museum/index.html)

The Transit Archive has an extensive photo collection documenting the construction of and alterations to the city's numerous subway lines. The early routes constructed during the first quarter of the twentieth century are more fully represented and include street-level photographs before construction and street-level and below-ground construction-period photos. These images are of very high quality and contain incredible details of the buildings adjacent to the routes including storefront infill and other architectural details. Additional information in the archive include photographs of trolley cars and buses and historical transit maps.

It is necessary to call and make an appointment in advance and there is currently only one staff archivist – so patience is required. Research appointments are usually scheduled two weeks in advance.

New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. The Arsenal, 830 Fifth Avenue at 64<sup>th</sup> Street.

Hours: Monday-Friday, 9:00-5:00. Parks Library, Room 240 360-8240; Olmsted Center, Flushing (718) 760-6798.

Internet: <http://www.nycgovparks.org/>

Parks Library: [http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_about/parks\\_history/library/library.html](http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_about/parks_history/library/library.html)

Historical Signs: [http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_your\\_park/historical\\_signs.html](http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs.html)

NYC Parks maintains a diverse collection of primary and secondary source materials relating to the history of the city's numerous parks. The majority of the collection is held in the Parks Library at the Arsenal, which dates to 1851 and is one of two buildings within the park's borders constructed before the park was established. Additional resources, including map data, are located at the Olmsted Center in

Flushing, Queens. The Municipal Archives (see above) also maintains resources relating to the development and design of the city's parks, particularly the Robert Moses era, and should be consulted too. The Parks Department recently completed a Historical Sign project providing historical information on the more than 1,700 parks in the city. The text of these signs is online and may be a good starting point for your research. Once you have targeted your research, you can contact the Parks Historian or the Parks Library about source materials and setting up a research appointment.

Keep in mind that these are working city offices dedicated to maintaining the city's parks. They are equipped to handle research requests but not large groups.

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. 1 Centre Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor North. Hours: Monday – Friday, 9:00-5:00 (669-7700).

Internet: [http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_your\\_park/historical\\_signs.html](http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs.html)

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission has written a designation report on every individual landmark and historic district. Some of the earlier reports are not very substantive, but the reports prepared since the mid 1970s are very valuable sources of information. These reports deal with individual buildings, architects, neighborhoods, building types, etc. It is also possible to arrange to pick up a report at the Commission's offices. Call and ask for the research department. There is a fee for some reports.

Although designation reports are available at LPC, it is far easier to access these reports online or the Municipal Reference Library (see above). The LPC also has the designation photos, or the photos taken when a building or district was landmarked. They also have some photos from the 1960s to present day of areas surveyed for possible designation. Fill out an Appointment Request for Records Access form online at [http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/forms/appointment\\_request\\_form.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/forms/appointment_request_form.pdf) to request to see any report or other LPC files.